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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000581

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PL

SUBJECT: KACZYNSKI TWINS PRESS FOR ELECTIONS OR COALITION
WITH POPULIST SELF DEFENSE

REF: WARSAW 518 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Mary T. Curtin, Political Counselor for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The political drama in Warsaw continues unabated with President Lech Kaczynski on March 23 joining in calls for early parliamentary elections this spring. Unconvinced, the Polish parliament voted down a proposal by the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party intended as a first step to solving the latest political impasse, namely expeditious consideration of proposed changes to the Polish electoral law. Jaroslaw Kaczynski hoped such changes would induce the opposition Civic Platform (PO) to support PiS's proposal to dissolve Parliament, which will be considered April 4. It is not expected to pass, and PO remains undeterred in its opposition. PiS is also considering a formal coalition with the populist Self Defense (SO) party, and its flamboyant leader, Andrzej Lepper -- at best a political gamble -- unless the Kaczynskis reconsider having the government of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz resign. Having offered to do so two weeks ago, Marcinkiewicz last week said there was no need to resign and that his government was functioning well. His fate remains uncertain, although the Kaczynskis will move carefully, since Marcinkiewicz continues to outpoll all other politicians in Poland. End Summary.

¶2. (U) PiS Party Chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski's latest political ploy to bolster the fortunes of Poland's minority government involved two proposed steps. First, the Parliament would act expeditiously on a proposed law to change Poland's electoral system, to provide for the direct election of half of the Sejm from single member districts, and the other half according to the present proportional system. The PiS chief hoped the proposed changes would be a sweetener for PO to support the second step, the government's motion to dissolve the Parliament. If passed, early elections could be held in May, before the anticipated visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Poland. This weekend Jaroslaw Kaczynski announced that PiS would like the elections to be held on May 21.

¶3. (U) On March 23, President Lech Kaczynski endorsed the plans for early elections, calling his twin Jaroslaw's plan a "good idea," that would enhance the stability of the government. On March 23, PiS introduced its motion for expeditious treatment for the proposed amendments to the electoral law. The plans faltered, however, because only the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) voted with PiS. The motion was voted down in a party-line vote with 149 voting in favor and 280 against. Work on the proposed changes to the electoral system thus will begin only when the Parliament next meets on April 4. Jaroslaw Kaczynski argues that the proposed changes would not require amending the Polish Constitution because they do not affect how a majority of the seats are elected. That contention is widely disputed by constitutional scholars. Opposition leader Donald Tusk said that there was no reason to rush through such a significant change to the electoral system in Poland, even though PO in principle supports moving toward single-member districts.

¶4. (U) On March 23, the government also submitted a proposal for the self-dissolution of Parliament, which will be considered on April 4. It requires a two-third's majority vote to pass. With PO opposing the government's efforts, it will fail. On March 27, President Kaczynski called a meeting with PO leaders Donald Tusk, Jan Rokita and Grzegorz Schetyna, to try to convince them to endorse the government's plans and timelines. PO turned him down flat.

¶5. (U) PiS has painted itself into a political corner, with only two feasible options. One involves a political gamble, forming a coalition with SO, possibly offering Andrzej Lepper the position of Deputy Prime Minister (as he is demanding) and delivering four ministries to SO (Agriculture, Labor, Environment and Administration are the most widely cited options). The other option, less likely this week, is the resignation of the Prime Minister, thus forcibly starting an electoral clock that would result in a new round of elections in May or June. PM Marcinkiewicz offered to resign two weeks ago, although he consistently claims the government is performing well. Given how swiftly the political winds are blowing in Warsaw, the story could be entirely different in the coming days.

16. (C) Comment: PO has nothing to lose and everything to gain by sitting on the sidelines if Andrzej Lepper joins the government formally. It is hard to imagine, given his history of political flamboyance, that Lepper would prove a trustworthy governing partner, and PiS could pay a political price in the long run, given Lepper's notoriety. Traveling in Bratislava on March 24, President Kaczynski himself said he was not in favor of a formal coalition with SO. PiS still has an option to have PM Marcinkiewicz resign, thus forcing elections in a timeframe (sooner rather than later) that they believe is politically advantageous. Marcinkiewicz could also hold a non-binding no confidence vote in the Parliament.

Although not constitutionally required to do so, Marcinkiewicz might resign if he failed to win such a vote. However, there are some within PiS who are concerned that Marcinkiewicz, who has the highest public marks in nationwide polls, might agree to resign only to bolt from PiS and forge some other kind of political coalition with PO. This may explain why the Kaczynskis are not moving forward -- today at least -- on the easier political option of having the PiS government resign.

17. (C) Comment, Continued: Concerns several weeks ago among some observers that PiS's attacks on the press and on the Central Bank could threaten Poland's democracy have evolved into a sense of bewilderment and embarrassment over the constant turmoil in Polish politics. The shifting tactics of PiS's leadership, they fear, will hurt Poland's image and the ability of PM Marcinkiewicz to govern.
HILLAS